NOTICES

OFFICE OF STATE ETHICS

Office of State Ethics advisory opinions are published herein pursuant to General Statutes Sections 1-81 (3) and 1-92 (5) and are printed exactly as submitted to the Commission on Official Legal Publications.

Advisory Opinion No. 2021-1, April 22, 2021

Ouestion Presented: The petitioner, a member of the Connecticut Port

Authority's board of directors, asks how the Code's conflict provisions apply to his official activities as a board member relating to two properties, Saybrook Junction (in which he has no ownership interest) and the commercial property located at 75 Crystal

Avenue, New London (which he owns).

Brief Answer: Mr. Johnson may take official action in his capacity

as a member of the Connecticut Port Authority's board of directors only to the extent that he does not have a "substantial" conflict under General Statutes § 1-85, and that, if he has a "potential" conflict under General Statutes § 1-86 (a), he follows the procedure set forth in that provision for "member[s] of

a state regulatory agency."

At its March 18, 2021 regular meeting, the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board ("Board") granted the petition for an advisory opinion submitted by John S. Johnson, a member of the board of directors of the Connecticut Port Authority ("CPA"). The Board now issues this advisory opinion in accordance with General Statutes § 1-81 (a) (3) of the Code of Ethics for Public Officials ("Code").

Background

In his petition, Mr. Johnson provides the following facts for our consideration:

There is a question by some that I as a member of the CPA have a conflict of interest because I own commercial property in the vicinity of State Pier and therefore should not be involved in any of the discussions re the operation of the State Pier.

Additionally I have been accused by one member of the public that I own Saybrook Junction in Old Saybrook and "steered" CPA to that facility to rent space thereby benefitting me financially.

With regard to the ownership of commercial property located at 75 Crystal Ave, NL, I bought the property in 1999 and have owned it for now 22 years. It is separated from State Pier by the AMTRAK tracks and State Pier Road. The facility is fully rented to three entities, none of who is doing any business with Port of New London or State Pier. One company is a defense contractor Curtis Wright out of North Carolina.

¹ The petition was granted to address Mr. Johnson's *prospective* conduct only, for the Board generally will not respond to a request for an advisory opinion addressing the propriety of a public official's or state employee's past conduct.

The second tenant is North East Electrical, a wholesale electrical supply house based out of Florida. And the other tenant is ASPLUNDH Construction who use their space as a yard and indoor facility to store and repair their equipment. They are tree surgeons with no affiliation with State Pier.

It is a stretch in my opinion to accuse me of a conflict of interest having owned the building for as long as I have. I was selected by the Governor several years ago to serve on the Board when the CPA was just being stood up as an Authority because of my Maritime experience and my depth of local knowledge about the waterfront etc. I don't feel that any of my votes has ever been slanted to make my property more valuable. My vote on any issues related to State Pier was one vote only and never a deciding vote as to what the future of State Pier was to be. In discussion with the Ethics Commission several months ago, it was my understanding that as a Board member, if we felt there was a conflict of interest, it was our duty and responsibility to recuse. I would certainly do that should I ever perceive such a conflict.

With regard to my ownership of Saybrook Junction where CPA maintains their office, I have never owned and do not own nor do I have any plans to ever own Saybrook Junction. I will admit that prior to CPA renting space, I had an agreement to buy the property, but shortly before I was to take title, the owner was taken to jail for tax fraud and the whole deal fell apart. That agreement to purchase the Saybrook property, occurred at least a year before CPA started their lease with the new owners.

To be accused of owning Saybrook Junction and steering CPA to Old Saybrook is outrageous and uncalled for. I take such accusations personally and do request that this matter also be looked into.

Analysis

On the threshold issue of jurisdiction, persons generally subject to the Code are described in it as either "Public officials" or "State employees." The Code defines "Public official" to include (among others) "any member or director of a quasipublic agency"; General Statutes § 1-79 (11); and it defines "Quasi-public agency" to include (among other entities) "the Connecticut Port Authority" General Statutes § 1-79 (12). As a member of the CPA board of directors, then, Mr. Johnson is a "Public official," meaning that he is subject to the Code.

The Code provisions most pertinent here are General Statutes §§ 1-85 and 1-86 (a)—which define and proscribe "substantial" and "potential" conflicts of interests—and our task here is to apply those provisions to Mr. Johnson's *prospective* conduct as a CPA board member concerning two properties: Saybrook Junction and the commercial property located at 75 Crystal Avenue, New London.

1. "Substantial" Conflicts of Interests

Section 1-85 contains a general rule and an exception, the general rule being this: A public official has a "substantial conflict" and "may not take official action on [a] matter" if "he has *reason to believe or expect* that he, his spouse, a dependent

child, or a *business with which he is associated* will derive a *direct* monetary gain or suffer a *direct* monetary loss . . . by reason of his official activity'' (Emphasis added.) And the exception is this: A substantial conflict does not exist if such benefit or detriment accrues to any of the listed persons (i.e., self, spouse, etc.) as a member of a profession, occupation, or group to no greater extent than to any other member of the profession, occupation, or group.² (For example, a public official whose spouse is a teacher would not have a substantial conflict concerning a matter that would result in a uniform financial benefit to all teachers.)

Before getting to some examples of substantial conflicts under § 1-85, a few definitions (of the italicized terms) are in order:

- "Reason to believe or expect": "A public official . . . has reason to believe or expect the derivation of a direct monetary gain or loss by reason of his or her official activity . . . when there is . . . specific information available to the individual which would clearly indicate to a reasonable person that such a direct benefit or detriment would accrue or when the language of the legislation, regulation or matter in question would so indicate." Regs., Conn. State Agencies § 1-81-28 (c).
- "Business with which he is associated": "any . . . entity through which business for profit or not for profit is conducted in which the public official . . . or member of his or her immediate family is a director, officer, owner, limited or general partner, beneficiary of a trust or holder of stock constituting five per cent or more of the total outstanding stock of any class . . . 'Officer' refers only to the president, executive or senior vice president or treasurer of such business.'' General Statutes § 1-79 (2).
- "Direct": "absolute, immediate, or without intervening circumstances." Declaratory Ruling 92-C.

With those definitions in mind, we turn to some examples of substantial conflicts under § 1-85. According to the regulations, (1) "a state employee required, in the course of his or her official duties, to determine whether a consulting contract should be awarded to his or her spouse has a substantial conflict, and may not take official action on the matter"; and (2) "if a legislator is on the board of directors of a forprofit corporation" (making it a "business with which the legislator is associated"), and "if the corporation applied to the General Assembly for bonding, the legislator/ director would have a substantial conflict, and may not take official action on the specific bonding request." Regs., Conn. State Agencies § 1-81-28. Similarly, "an official could not: award a state contract to his business; hire an immediate family member for a state job; or issue a permit or license to [his] company All these official actions would result in an impermissible 'direct monetary gain'" Informal Request for Advisory Opinion No. 2501 (1999).

Another example stems from Informal Request for Advisory Opinion No. 0897 (1992), which is relevant here because it involved a board member of a (then) quasi-public agency, the Connecticut Convention Center Authority ("CCCA"), who wanted to become a member of a partnership that owned property near one of two sites for the planned convention center. The CCCA board member asked whether, "as a limited partner in the proposed development of a hotel to be built near the planned convention center," he must "abstain from voting on the choice between the two sites which the Site Selection Committee is expected to recommend to the

² The term "group" "must be equivalent in size and interests to a 'profession' or 'occupation.' "Advisory Opinion No. 99-5.

³ The term "Business with which he is associated" does not include the relationship of unpaid director or officer of a non-profit entity. See General Statutes § 1-79 (2).

full [CCCA]." Apparently, "the partnership . . . own[ed] a parcel of commercial property near one of the two sites," and if the other site was selected, "the partnership would [have] ma[de] an additional purchase of land, near such other site, upon which to build a hotel." The response—which is worth quoting in full, particularly given that it discusses and contrasts two previous advisory opinions involving another CCCA board member—was as follows:

The Commission is cognizant of two recent advisory opinions issued to the [CCCA] chairperson, E. Clayton Gengras, Jr., in which the Commission stated that Mr. Gengras was not prohibited from taking official action to select a site for the convention center, despite being the income beneficiary of a trust which owns commercial property close to one of the proposed sites. In that case, any financial gain or loss would result from changes in property value attributable to the location of the convention center. Given the fact that the property in question is subject to a 31-year lease to a bank, the consequences of any such changes in the property's value were considered, by the Commission, to be too speculative and remote to constitute a substantial conflict of interest within the meaning of § 1-85. (See . . . Advisory Opinions Nos. 92-8 . . . and 92-16 . . .).

In contrast, under the circumstances described by the petitioner, any action he might take to choose one site over the other could be expected to result in a direct and unique monetary gain or loss for the partnership in question. The partnership does not merely own property near one of the sites, it has also expressed its intention to build a hotel close to the convention center site, wherever that may be. The financial impact of the Authority's decision on the partnership will be direct, immediate and distinct from the impact on persons who may own property near one or both of the proposed sites, but who have not planned a development project specifically linked to the convention center. Therefore, should the petitioner become a limited partner in the hotel development project he has described, he will be required, pursuant to . . . § 1-85, to refrain from voting on the site selection.

Applying all of that here, Mr. Johnson must ask the following question whenever confronted with taking official action on a matter in his capacity as a CPA board member: Is there specific information available to him that would clearly indicate to a reasonable person, or does the language of the matter in question so indicate, that there would be a direct (i.e., immediate) and unique financial impact on him, his spouse, a dependent child, or a "business with which he is associated"? If the answer is yes, he has a substantial conflict under § 1-85 and is barred from taking official action on the matter.

With respect to the two properties at issue, given that, according to Mr. Johnson, he has no financial interest in Saybrook Junction, he is free to take official action as a CPA board member concerning that property, such as voting on whether to renew the CPA's existing lease at that location. This assumes, of course, that none of the other persons listed in § 1-85—i.e., Mr. Johnson's spouse, a dependent child, or a "business with which [Mr. Johnson] is associated"—have a financial interest in Saybrook Junction that would be directly and uniquely impacted by the action.

As for the other property, i.e., 75 Crystal Avenue, New London, given that Mr. Johnson owns it, he may not take official action as a CPA board member that would have a direct and unique financial impact on his financial interests by virtue of his ownership of this property. For example, if the CPA board were to vote on whether to lease space at that property, Mr. Johnson would have a substantial conflict and be barred by § 1-85 from taking official action. He would likewise have a substantial conflict and be barred from taking official action with respect to any CPA matter that would have a direct (rather than speculative and remote) and unique (as compared to all other properties in the area) impact on the value of that property.

2. "Potential" Conflicts of Interests

Where there is no "substantial" conflict because the financial impact on the listed person either would be indirect or would be direct but would fit within § 1-85's exception, there may still be a "potential" conflict under § 1-86 (a). A potential conflict exists when a public official, in the discharge of his official duties, "would be required to take an action that would affect a financial interest of such official . . . such official's . . . spouse, parent, brother, sister, child or the spouse of a child or a business with which such official . . . is associated" General Statutes § 1-86 (a). No potential conflict exists if the financial impact is de minimis (i.e., less than \$100 per person per year) or indistinct from that of a substantial segment of the general public (e.g., all licensed drivers). General Statutes § 1-86 (a); Regs. Conn. State Agencies § 1-81-30. Potential conflicts, unlike substantial conflicts, do not require "that the financial impact . . . be direct," but "there . . . must be a reasonable expectation on the part of the individual that there will be some financial impact based on his actions." Advisory Opinion No. 93-11.

Advisory Opinion No. 1999-18 represents an apt example of a "potential" conflict under § 1-86, for it involved a public official/property owner whose financial interests were indirectly impacted by his official action. In that opinion, the Commission was asked if the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management ("OPM") could rule on a property-revaluation waiver submitted by the city of Waterbury, where he was a homeowner. Absent a waiver, the city would lose almost \$10 million in state aid, which "almost certainly" would trigger an increase in the city's mill rate, followed by an increase in property taxes to the city, followed by an estimated \$300 annual increase in the Secretary's property tax. Said the Commission, "[c]learly, the Secretary of OPM will be required to take an action which would affect his financial interest," and "the interest is neither de minimis (defined . . . as less than \$100 per year) nor is it shared by a 'substantial segment' of the general public (defined . . . as equivalent to 'all licensed drivers, all homeowners, all parents, etc.')." The Commission concluded, therefore, that the OPM Secretary had a potential conflict under § 1-86 (a).

Applying § 1-86 (a) here, Mr. Johnson has a potential conflict if the following holds true: Under existing facts, a reasonable person would "expect"—i.e., consider it likely, rather than merely conceivable—that action taken by the CPA board would affect his financial interest or the financial interest of the listed family members or a "business with which he is associated," and the financial interest is neither de minimis (<\$100) nor shared by a substantial segment of the general public.

⁴ Obviously, if the property is owned by a "business with which [Mr. Johnson] is associated" (e.g., a limited liability company of which he is an owner), he may not take official action as a CPA board member that would have a direct and unique financial impact on the business's financial interests by virtue of its ownership of the property.

⁵ The exception—which is mentioned above on page 4—states: A substantial conflict does not exist if such benefit or detriment accrues to any of the listed persons (i.e., self, spouse, etc.) as a member of a profession, occupation, or group to no greater extent than to any other member of the profession, occupation, or group. General Statutes § 1-85.

With respect to the two properties, Mr. Johnson cannot, based on the facts presented, have a potential conflict concerning Saybrook Junction, considering he has no financial interest in it, and assuming none of the listed family members or any "business with which he is associated" do so. As for the property located at 75 Crystal Avenue, New London, if, by virtue of his ownership of it, a reasonable person would expect that action taken by the CPA board would affect his financial interests in an amount exceeding \$100, he has a potential conflict. For example, a potential conflict would exist for Mr. Johnson under § 1-86 (a) if a reasonable person would consider it likely that action taken by the CPA board would increase the property's value by \$100 or more.

In the event that Mr. Johnson is faced with a potential conflict under § 1-86 (a)—as opposed to a substantial conflict under § 1-85, which always demands recusal—how he is to proceed depends on whether he is what § 1-86 (a) calls a "member of a state regulatory agency." That term is defined via regulation as follows: "a member of any commission, board, council, *authority* or other similar body which is authorized by law to regulate, i.e., control, administer, or *oversee*, any profession, occupation, industry, activity, fund, *endeavor* or area of conduct." (Emphasis added.) Regs., Conn. State Agencies § 1-81-30 (c). The CPA (i.e., the Connecticut Port *Authority*) is certainly an "authority" and, under its enabling provisions, is charged with "oversee[ing]" an "endeavor," namely, "the development of Connecticut's ports and harbors" General Statutes § 15-31b. Accordingly, as one of its board members, Mr. Johnson is, in fact, a "member of a state regulatory agency," meaning that, in the case of a potential conflict, § 1-86 (a) gives him two options:

either [1] excuse himself . . . from the matter or [2] prepare a written statement signed under penalty of false statement describing the matter requiring action and the nature of the potential conflict and explaining why despite the potential conflict, [he] . . . is able to vote and otherwise participate fairly, objectively and in the public interest. [He] . . . shall deliver a copy of the statement to the Office of State Ethics and enter a copy of the statement in the journal or minutes of the [CPA].

Conclusion

This advisory opinion represents a general overview of how § 1-85 and 1-86 (a) could apply to Mr. Johnson, in his capacity as a CPA board member, in relation to the properties at issue. If, going forward, he has any hesitation as to whether, with respect to any particular CPA matter, he has a substantial or potential conflict under those provisions, the Board urges him to either seek an informal opinion from the Legal Division of the Office of State Ethics or, if necessary, petition this Board for further advice.

By order of the Board,

Dated 4/22/21

/s/Dena M. Castricone Chairperson

⁶ CPA employees (as opposed to CPA board members) are not "members of a state regulatory agency," for that term applies only to members of regulatory panels. Such employees must, in the case of a potential or substantial conflict, "prepare a written statement signed under penalty of false statement describing the matter requiring action and the nature of the conflict and deliver a copy of the statement to such . . . employee's immediate superior . . . who shall assign the matter to another employee" General Statutes § 1-86 (a).

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Advisory Opinion No. 2021-2, May 20, 2021

Question Presented: The petitioner, an employee of Capital Community

College, asks whether the Code prohibits him from submitting a reference letter, in his personal capacity, on behalf of his second cousin, who is seeking an adjunct position at another state community college.

Brief Answer: The "use of office" provision in General Statutes

§ 1-84 (c) does not extend to distant familial relations such as a second cousin and thus does not prohibit a state employee from providing a reference letter recommending his second cousin for a state position.

At its April 22, 2021 regular meeting, the Citizen's Ethics Advisory Board ("Board") granted the petition for an advisory opinion submitted by Marcus G. Lawson, an employee of Capital Community College, which is part of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities ("CSCU") system. The Board now issues this advisory opinion in accordance with General Statutes § 1-81 (a) (3) of the Code of Ethics for Public Officials ("Code").

Background

In his petition, Mr. Lawson provides the following facts for our consideration:

I work for the Connecticut Community College System in Hartford, Connecticut at Capital Community College. The family member in question has **previously worked** at Gateway Community College, New Haven, Connecticut, and for which **I haven't provided** at the time a reference to her for this earlier, adjunct position.

Needless to say, this is the first time I am providing a reference to this family member in question, and I have not released this reference. The reference that I have stored on my desktop computer has **not** been written on State of Connecticut letter head, nor have I used my State of Connecticut office number, title or any discernable information connecting me to the State of Connecticut is found on this general reference.

(Emphasis in original). Mr. Lawson identifies the relative on whose behalf he seeks to submit a reference letter as "Jennell Lawson[,] a second cousin of mine." He further represents in the petition that he does not share any business endeavors or have a business relationship with this second cousin.

Analysis

On the threshold jurisdiction issue, persons generally subject to the Code are described in it as either "Public officials" or "State employees." The Code defines

"State employee" to include, among others, "any employee in the executive . . . branch of state government, whether in the classified or unclassified service and whether full or part-time" General Statutes § 1-79 (13). According to the Connecticut State Register and Manual (2020), the State System of Higher Education is part of the executive branch of state government, and according to General Statutes § 10a-1, the state system of public higher education includes, among other entities, "the regional community-technical colleges" As an employee of Connecticut's community college system at Capital Community College, then, Mr. Lawson is a "State employee" who is subject to the Code.

The relevant provision here is General Statutes § 1-84 (c), which provides, in relevant part, as follows: "no . . . state employee shall use his public . . . position . . . to obtain financial gain for himself, his spouse, child, child'sspouse, parent, brother or sister or a business with which he is associated." (Emphasis added). "Unless there is evidence to the contrary, statutory itemization indicates that the legislature intended the list to be exclusive." Republican Party of Connecticut v. Merrill, 307 Conn. 470, 492–93 (2012). See also Advisory Opinion No. 1995-15 (declining to extend the meaning of "immediate family" beyond the listed terms in the Code definition for purposes of applying the "open and public" requirements of General Statutes § 1-84 (i)); Request for Advisory Opinion No. 17099 (2019) ("the 'use of office' prohibition under . . ." 1-84 (c) do[es] not extend to distant familial relations such as [the state employee's] sister's brother-in-law").

Accordingly, it follows here that, because the legislature did not include "second cousin" or "cousin" on the § 1-84 (c) list, the Code does not, from a technical standpoint, prohibit the petitioner from providing his second cousin with a reference to assist her in applying for employment with Connecticut's community college system, provided that neither the petitioner, any of the family members listed in § 1-84 (c), nor any "business with which he is associated," as defined in General Statutes § 1-79 (2), will receive any financial benefit from his providing his second cousin with such reference.

With respect to whether there is an appearance of impropriety, "[t]he Code . . . does not speak of appearance of conflict, only actualities." Advisory Opinion No. 90-6. That is not to say that Capital Community College or the CSCU system may not institute (or do not already have) rules that are more restrictive than those in the Code, and we recommend that the petitioner seek advice from his human resources office. See Advisory Opinion No. 2008-3.

By order of the Board,
/s/Dena M. Castricone

Dated <u>5/20/21</u>

Chairperson

Notice of Application for Reinstatement to the Bar

On May 20, 2021, Justin Freeman filed in the Superior Court for the Judicial District of Hartford, in CV18-6103946-S, an Application for Reinstatement as an Attorney Admitted to the Practice of Law in Connecticut. The Application will be referred to a Standing Committee on Recommendations for Admission to the Bar.

Brandon Pelegano Chief Clerk Hartford JD

Supreme Court Sessions

Notice is hereby given that the calendar of sessions for the next court year has been adopted.

Sessions last approximately two weeks and are subject to change. Any deviation from the calendar as adopted, will be noticed in the court's Docket.

The first day of each of the sessions for the 2021–2022 court year is as follows: September 8, 2021; October 12, 2021; November 15, 2021; December 13, 2021; January 10, 2022; February 14, 2022; March 21, 2022; and April 25, 2022.

Carl D. Cicchetti

Chief Clerk

Appellate Court Sessions

Notice is hereby given that the calendar of sessions for the next court year has been adopted.

Sessions last approximately three weeks and are subject to change. Any deviation from the calendar as adopted, will be noticed in the court's Docket.

The first day of each of the sessions for the 2021–2022 court year is as follows: September 1, 2021; October 4, 2021; November 8, 2021; January 3, 2022; January 31, 2022; February 28, 2022; April 4, 2022; and May 9, 2022.

Carl D. Cicchetti

Chief Clerk

Docket and Assignment Posting Dates for Supreme and Appellate 2021–2022 Court Years

Docket and case assignment information is available on the Judicial Branch website and at http://appellateinquiry.jud.ct.gov. The electronic posting on the Judicial Branch website is the official notice of the dockets and assignments except for incarcerated self-represented parties and individuals who have an exemption from e-filing who will continue to receive notice by mail. See Practice Book sections 69-1 and 69-3. Notice of the cases the Appellate Court determines should be considered onthe court's motion calendar for dismissal or sanction will also be by mail. The information below provides docket and assignment posting dates for both courts for the 2021 – 2022 court year.

Supreme Court Docket	Information available on or about
First Term Docket	Posted to the website June 28, 2021
Second Term Docket	Posted to the website August 20, 2021
Third Term Docket	Posted to the website September 24, 2021
Fourth Term Docket	Posted to the website October 25, 2021
Fifth Term Docket	Posted to the website November 29, 2021
Sixth Term Docket	Posted to the website January 6, 2022
Seventh Term Docket	Posted to the website February 7, 2022
Eighth Term Docket	Posted to the website March 14, 2022
Supreme Court Assignment	Information available on or about
First Term Assignment	Posted to the website July 29, 2021
Second Term Assignment	Posted to the website September 16, 2021
Third Term Assignment	Posted to the website October 15, 2021
Fourth Term Assignment	Posted to the website November 19, 2021
Fifth Term Assignment	Posted to the website December 23, 2021
Sixth Term Assignment	Posted to the website January 27, 2022
Seventh Term Assignment	Posted to the website March 2, 2022
Eighth Term Assignment	Posted to the website April 8, 2022
Appellate Court Docket	Information available on or about
First Term Docket	Posted to the website July 13, 2021
Second Term Docket	Posted to the website August 23, 2021
Third Term Docket	Posted to the website September 28, 2021
Fourth Term Docket	Posted to the website November 9, 2021
Fifth Term Docket	Posted to the website December 14, 2021
Sixth Term Docket	Posted to the website January 20, 2022
Seventh Term Docket	Posted to the website February 28, 2022
Eighth Term Docket	Posted to the website April 4, 2022

. . . continued

Appellate Court Assignment	Information available on or about
First Term Assignment	Posted to the website August 13, 2021
Second Term Assignment	Posted to the website September 21, 2021
Third Term Assignment	Posted to the website October 26, 2021
Fourth Term Assignment	Posted to the website December 7, 2021
Fifth Term Assignment	Posted to the website January 13, 2022
Sixth Term Assignment	Posted to the website February 17, 2022
Seventh Term Assignment	Posted to the website March 25, 2022
Eighth Term Assignment	Posted to the website April 28, 2022